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AN APPEAL

—TO—

THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC,

—ON THE—

INCONSISTENCY OF WAR

—WITH THE—

GOSPEL DISPENSATION,

—BY THE—

"SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,"

IN CANADA.

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1869.

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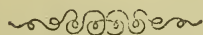
TO THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC,

ON THE

Inconsistency of War with the Gospel Dispensation,

—BY THE—

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN CANADA.



AT A MEETING

OF the Representatives of the Religious Society of Friends, in the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada, under a solemn sense of our Responsibility, as professed Christians, to advocate the cause of our glorified Captain—the great Prince of Peace, we feel constrained in the love of Christ, to lay before the christian public the following

APPEAL :

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—

The great question of “whether carnal warfare can be reconciled with the principles and spirit of the christian religion,” should, and, may we not hope, is claiming, the serious attention of the christian world. If we view the subject only in its financial relations, a deep consideration of it is well worthy of the profound attention not only of the christian, but of the statesman and the philanthropist. The celebrated Thomas Dick says:—“Had the money which has been expended even by professed christian nations during the past century, in the madness of warfare, been expended for philanthropic purposes, it would have been sufficient to have cultivated all the wastes of our globe, and to have made ‘the wilderness to blossom as the rose;’” Isaiah chap. 35; ver. 1.

It is a fact with which every student of history is familiar, that nearly all nations, more particularly those called christian, are at this moment groaning under the heavy burden of national indebtedness, which has been the accumulation of years, and is admittedly, to a great extent, the consequence of a preparation for, or engagement in, actual warfare; although a large majority of those interested, may be as infatuated as ever, upon the subject of military operations, and as willing as their predecessors to increase those burdens by augmenting the national liabilities, for these questionable purposes, under the mistaken notion of patriotism and duty. Yet, it can scarcely be doubted, but that the time will come when those grievous pecuniary burdens will be viewed from a different stand-point; and will then be regarded as a melancholy evidence of the folly and Anti-Christian usages of a by-gone age.

It surely is a lamentable consideration, that while the public funds are doled out with a parsimonious hand, (comparatively speaking,) to feed the poor—clothe the naked—raise the humbler classes of all nations from ignorance and its oft consequent effects, crime, and fit them for their several duties, as peaceful and law-abiding citizens of the State, that the same funds are not only spent with a liberal hand, but even in reckless profusion, to teach a professedly christian population the most complete mode of human slaughter. Now, we solemnly appeal to the purer feelings of every spiritual christian, who must believe the truth of the apostolic declaration, that "God is love:" 1st John, chap. 4; 16 ver., and ask him to query with himself whether the present course of the nations of the earth in their efforts to cultivate a military spirit is at all in harmony with the professed spirit of the boasted christian civilization of this enlightened time? or whether it is not a retrograde movement more in accordance with the barbarous usages of a by-gone age, where an Alexander was said to weep because he had no more worlds to conquer, and when the highest ambition of the most refined heathen ruler was to make every man a soldier? We respectfully ask attention for a moment to the position of a soldier, presuming that individual responsibility to the Great Supreme will be freely conceded: and in view of that responsibility, how is it possible for any man to pledge himself, by oath or otherwise, to yield unreserved obedience to the will of another; and as military discipline requires this indisputable obedience, and as military operations could not successfully be carried on without it, does it not plainly follow that when a professed christian becomes a soldier he makes a deliberate attempt to achieve a Scriptural impossibility? viz:—that of serving two masters.—Matthew, chap. 6; ver. 24.

In looking more particularly at the moral aspect of the question, strange as it may appear, we find even the professed christian portion of the world, divided in sentiment. While on the one hand it is claimed that God only works by means, and that he would fail to protect us though we should wholly rely upon him if we did not make every possible effort to defend ourselves, when in the language of Paley, "an injury was perpetrated, attempted or feared." On the other hand it is claimed that war, under every circumstance, is Anti-Christian and inexpedient: that a government established upon the only proper basis—the basis of christianity, and conducted under the benign influence of its pure and peaceable spirit, will need no other protection than the guardianship of the Supreme Ruler of the world.

The attentive observer will not marvel at this diversity of sentiment, more especially when he calls to mind, that what has happened may again transpire, "and as the leaders of the people once caused them to err:" Isaiah, chap. 9; ver. 16, even so now in reference to the subject before us, may we not trace the errors in public sentiment, not only to the cause of many ministers of the Gospel, but to the melancholy fact that some of those professedly delegated shepherds of the flock are actually found defending the practice, and encouraging their brethren to engage in its bloody work. Some of us can call to mind a lamentable illustration of this truth, during the time of the Crimean war. On a certain occasion, while the allied armies lay before Sebastopol, a prominent minister of a highly respected christian church, delivered a public lecture, in which he undertook to defend the anomalous doctrine that the meek and devoted followers of the Prince of Peace might justly engage in war; and as the present one was, he assured them, altogether justifiable, that christians ought to pray for its onward progress. Said lecture was published for general circulation, as would appear, under the sanction of the church itself. We can scarcely divest ourselves of the belief that this unfortunate state of the case arises mainly from the want of a candid inquiry into the Scriptural grounds of the question. This belief is further strengthened by the course too generally pursued by the clergy of the United States, during the late civil war. They no doubt greatly encouraged the combatants on both sides, not only by their prayers and exhortations, but some of them engaged in the service, and became active combatants themselves; and if reports say true soon shared the leavening influence of the School in which they were being instructed. "Know ye not," says the Apostle, "that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump:" Galatians, chap. 5; ver. 9: thereby clearly proving that the camp and battle-field are not the most eligible places to cultivate the graces of the spirit.

We claim that it is matter of historical record, that in the first and purest ages of the christian church, its votaries did not bear arms. They evidently considered it no part of their business to slaughter each other, or even to learn the Art. Like as they professed to be the followers of the Prince of Peace, and felt it to be their bounden duty, faithfully, to follow his self-denying unresisting example, they knew he had commanded them not only to love one another but even their enemies: Matt. chap. 5; ver. 44: and that if they would be his friends, they must "obey his commands:" John, chap. 15; ver. 14. They prayed for their sovereign; but took no part in his wars. They declared that the Saviour, by disarming Peter, had disarmed every soldier; and that since that time, it had been unlawful for christians to fight, because the prophecy had been fulfilled and the time had arrived when the people of God "should not learn war any more:" Micah, chap. 4; ver. 3. They evidently took the same view of the origin of war that the Apostle did when he queried—"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence even of your lusts that war in your numbers?" James chap. 4; ver. 1. We trust that it will be freely conceded, that the Holy Scriptures tell us that the time will arrive "when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain," and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea:" Isaiah, chap. 11; ver. 9: and then "he will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth:" Hosea, chap. 2; ver. 18. Observation also enables us to believe it to be the general sentiment of christians, that at that period the pacific character of Gospel times, as delineated by the Lord's prophets, will be fully displayed, when he to whom the Psalmist referred, when he said—"Thy throne, O God is forever and ever, the sceptre of thy kingdom is a light sceptre:" Psalms 45; ver. 6. The Prince of Peace will establish the universality of his kingdom, and his sovereignty be unreservedly acknowledged, when the church as the light of the world, will more visibly appear in all its beauty and power—"Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners:" Song of Solomon, chap. 6; ver. 10: or, when being represented as a king's daughter, she shall "be all glorious within, and her clothing (or external appearance will be comparable to) wrought gold:" Psalms 45; ver. 13. And as the prayers of the church are daily offered at the throne of Grace, that the great Disposer of events will be pleased to hasten that happy period, we ask in common candor, are these prayers offered in faith? and if so, what is the nature and character of that faith? Is it a living faith in the power and efficacy of the Gospel that will exert its leavening influence upon the corrupt nature of fallen man until all is brought

into harmony with the pure and peaceful character of its Divine Author—a “faith that works by love, and purifies the heart:” Galatians, chap. 5; ver. 6: and Acts, chap. 15; ver. 9. Or must we regard these prayers as prompted by a more historical faith, and therefore dead—arising out of the vague notion that these things must be accomplished because they are predicted by the spirit of prophecy without having any intelligent views as to how they are to be completed, or without striving to exercise a living, practical, experimental faith in the power of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, it being the last dispensation of God to man, where is to be found ample provision for all his needs and which is that alone that will ever be found to be the healer of breaches and the restorer of man to his primeval state “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy:” Job, chap. 38; ver. 7. “When in every place incense shall be offered to his Holy name a pure offering:” Malachi, chap. 1; ver. 11.

We declare our conviction, that it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ alone which will renovate the world, and that we are not warranted in expecting any other Gospel, or, in looking for any new or marvellous display of Divine power to usher in the golden age of the Church, which christians have been apparently expecting for eighteen centuries.

And here we would ask, if there is not a serious danger that christians, in reference to this important point, may be found occupying similar ground with the Jews of old, respecting the advent of the blessed Saviour. They believed in his coming, and that the time had nearly arrived when he should appear—were daily looking for him, and no doubt daily praying for the auspicious event; and although every circumstance conspired to bear testimony to his claim as being, He that should come, yet they refused to receive him, or listen to his highly instructive messages of love, which he so freely offered for their consideration.

The christian church is also looking for a second advent, when it is expected his peaceable Kingdom will be established; and it is a serious question, whether upon this subject the views of its members are not too outward and carnal, and hence fail sufficiently to recognize, the great Gospel truth that the Kingdom of God is within—“that it cometh not with observation,” Luke 17 chap., 20 ver., “but with power,” 1st Corinthians, 4 chap. 20 ver., “that it does not consist in meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,” Romans, 14 chap., 17 ver.—And that as citizens of that Spiritual Kingdom, Christians are bound to render implicit obedience to all the laws, by which it is governed. We have plainly unfolded in the Scriptures of truth, a code of the most sublime doctrines and purest ethics ever delivered

to man, bearing evident stamp of their Divine origin, having the seal of the great King and only lawgiver and rightful head and ruler of his people. We find them throughout inculcating this undeniable truth that God is love and that they only are his people who dwell in love.

We may draw instruction from the fact that the advocates of war though professedly christian, depend almost exclusively for its defence on the Jewish Scriptures. They wisely refrain from any laboured attempt to make the Prince of Peace, or his inspired apostles, the abettors of war. They, however, generally refer to two passages in the New Testament as a kind of negative testimony in their favour. We trust these will be found, after a candid investigation to give no countenance to such a doctrine. The fact that the Saviour accepted the faith of the Roman Centurion without noticing his profession, no more proves that he approved of war, than his silence in reference to his idolatry, proves that his dispensation admits the worship of idols. As to the language of the Baptist, had he directly approved of war, it would have had no bearing on the duties of the christian, because he only lived during the old dispensation and we might naturally suppose that his teachings would be in harmony therewith. This was not the christian system: he only predicted it to be near at hand. It however appears difficult to see in what way he approved of war, or how that universally acknowledged evil could be pursued under his instructions. True, he did not directly declare against the military system; but he assuredly prohibited its practice when he charged the soldiers to "do violence to no man," Luke, 3 chap., 14 ver.

Probably Paley offered a sufficient explanation in reference to the course pursued by the followers of our Lord on this question, which says,—“Christianity soliciting admission into the various portions of the earth” abstained, as behoved it, from meddling with the civil institutions of any,” but does it follow from the silence of scripture on the subject that all the existing institutions, were good, or that the bad should not be exchanged for the better.—We trust it will be admitted that the most learned casuist would labour in vain, should he attempt to show in what way a successful campaign could be conducted on christian principles, or in accordance with the teachings of the Baptist. Surely he would not recommend that an army, on the eve of a battle, should be charged “to do violence to no man,” nor would he recommend that their thirst for blood should be lessened, by teaching them “to love their enemies,” Matthew, 5 chap., 39 and 44, vers., and Rom. 12, 2 ver., to give them food and drink, and above all “to resist not evil.” The truth in this case will best appear by adopt-

ing the rational conclusion of Wellington, when he significantly said "that no man with any nice sense of religion had any business in the army." It remains to be the settled conviction of the society of Friends that all wars are not only anti-christian and inexpedient, but wholly impolitic and unnecessary; and that should an honest effort be made by any of the great powers of Europe or America to establish an international court, clothed with ample powers to take cognizance of all national disputes, such an effort, so in harmony with the principles of christianity and philanthropy must inevitably be crowned with success.

We would here suggest that no christian ought to engage in any work or calling on which he cannot in sincerity of faith, ask the blessing of God. In view of this fact, we ask the reader mentally to visit one of those horrifying scenes presented by a battle field at the close of a stubbornly contested engagement.—We do not wish to bring to his view any of those sanguinary conflicts once waged between Greece and Persia, or Rome and Carthage, bloody and repulsive as they are recorded in history, these being the work of the heathen and comparative barbarian; nor yet, to the more modern battles of Wellington and Napoleon. Neither to those dreadful slaughters in the Crimea, at the account of which the ear was pained and the soul sick with the daily report; but we will draw attention to one of those revolting scenes presented in the late civil war, among our neighbours, brethren of the same household of faith, worshippers professedly of the same God of love. Take for instance the battle of Gettysburg: can we suppose that any sane man can possibly believe that what is represented, as being there presented to the view of the beholder, could be the work of christian brethren, when the dead and dying were spread in dread confusion over the bloody field, when human beings originally created in the Divine image designed to reflect the glory of God and to be his ministers in works of mercy and benevolence, when those for whom a Saviour bled and died, lay wounded and slaughtered by hundreds and thousands in every conceivable form—when the groans and shrieks emanating from these mutilated forms of humanity, were enough to melt the most stony hearts, and then tell us, can such be the fruit of our Holy Religion, the Religion of Jesus? Can any one believe that such work was ever perpetrated by the true followers of Christ? "Ye shall know them by their fruits, do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles," Matthew, chap. 7, 16 ver. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," John chap. 13, 35 ver. "His servants ye are to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey," Rom. chap. 6, 16 ver. And "every tree is known by its fruits," Matthew chap. 12, ver. 33.

The follower of Mahomet may indeed appear consistent when supplicating for aid, because, it is said, that his religion constantly presents to the view of his mind, that such work will heighten his enjoyment and promote his welcome to his sensual paradise; but can the humble christian, whose God is love, and whose only Mediator is the Prince of Peace—can such, we say, become so engrossed in darkness as to make himself believe that his good spirit will help and instruct him to pray for the consummation of such a barbarous and bloody work? In conclusion we may add, it will doubtless plainly appear, that we have not attempted to bring any considerable portion of the evidence which might be adduced against the practice of war. This important subject has, at different times, been ably handled by men pre-eminent for education, philanthropy and piety; among whom we find Erasmus, Watson, Fox, Wesley, Dymond, Gurney, Upham, and others, to whose works on the subject we respectfully refer the reader.

Our object at present is not to argue the question, but simply to endeavor to arouse public attention to the subject, and if possible, to enlist the sympathy and influence of a christian people; but more especially the powerful influence of all gospel ministers, to help to impress upon the public mind the enormity of the evils of war, that these may, in a peculiar manner, have a claim to the blessing promised to the peacemakers, by endeavoring to bring about that great event promised in the Bible, looked for by the church, and daily asked for in the prayers of its individual members; a day in which the sword shall cease to devour—when the “battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood shall no longer be known;” Isaiah, chap. 9, 5th verse. “When they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;” Isaiah, chap. 2, 4th verse. “When violence shall no more be heard in our land, wasting nor distraction within our borders; but we shall call our walls salvation and our gates praise;” Isaiah, chap. 60, 18th verse.

Signed, on behalf and by direction of a meeting of the Representatives of the Religious Society of Friends, of the Yearly Meeting of Canada, held at Pickering, Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada, the 23rd and 24th of 2nd month, 1869.

IRA CLARK, CLERK.

